



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

REGION IX

75 Hawthorne Street
San Francisco, Ca. 94105

MAY 10 1991

May 10, 1991

Mr. Mike Tucker
U.S Department of Energy
P.O. Box 2567
Grand Junction, Colorado 81502

RE: Bluewater Uranium Mine Sites, Prewitt, New Mexico

Dear Mr. Tucker:

As discussed in our phone conversation on 5/10/91, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is currently assessing the radiological and environmental hazards associated with the abandoned mines located within the Bluewater Mining District, Prewitt, New Mexico. Two mining sites, the Brown-Vandever Mine and the Navajo-Desiderio Mine, were referred to EPA by the Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry (ATSDR) in October of 1990. A Public Health Advisory was issued by ATSDR in November of 1990 regarding these sites. As a result of this action, EPA's Emergency Response Section (ERS) was tasked to assess the sites in order to determine if an emergency clean-up action was warranted to protect neighboring residents and their livestock.

In late November, ERS conducted a field assessment at both mines. ERS collected soil, water and air samples at each mine. Using standard radiation detection equipment, an extensive gamma radiation survey was performed.

The data collected during this assessment revealed that radiation levels at the Brown-Vandever Site ranged from three microroentgens per hour (uR/h) to over 750 uR/h at waist level. On contact with the ground, the maximum level recorded exceeded 1,225 uR/h. In addition to excess gamma radiation, the soil sampling data indicated that the levels of radium-226 in the top 15 cm of soil exceed the regulatory limits (40 CFR 192) and radon-222 emission rates exceed the guidelines of 20 pCi per square meter per second (40 CFR 192).

Enclosed for your review is a copy of the data generated during the assessment, a copy of the ATSDR Health Advisor, and property description of the sites.

EPA believes that there may exist a significant health risk associated with living near these exposed mine tailings. At this time, EPA is researching the history of these mine operations in order to determine "potential responsible parties". EPA is working closely with the Department of Interior, Navajo Nation and

the State of New Mexico in order to solve this complex matter. EPA is planning to conduct a reclamation action at these mine sites to reduce the radiation hazards. To assist us in our effort in protecting the environment, EPA is requesting that the Department of Energy assist in this investigation. If you have any questions, please contact me at 415-744-2298.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert Bornstein", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Robert Bornstein
Federal On-Scene-Coordinator
Emergency Response Section

cc: Bill Weis, ERS Enforcement